

EU Justice Scoreboard 2017: justice systems becoming more effective, but challenges remain

Its aim is to assist national authorities to improve the effectiveness of their justice systems. Compared to previous editions, the [2017 Scoreboard](#) looks into new aspects of the functioning of justice systems, for example, how easily consumers can access justice and which channels they use to submit complaints against companies. For the first time, it also shows the length of criminal court proceedings relating to money laundering offences.

"The 5th edition of the EU Justice Scoreboard confirms that effective justice systems are essential to build trust in a business and investment-friendly environment in the single market" said Věra Jourová, EU Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality. "I encourage Member States to ensure that any justice reform respects the rule of law and judicial independence. This is key for citizens and businesses to fully enjoy their rights. An independent and well-functioning justice system is a fundamental pillar of every democracy."

Key findings of the 2017 edition include:

- **Shorter civil and commercial court proceedings:** including in a number of Member States whose justice systems are facing challenges. This improvement is clearer over the five-year period than in the short-term.
- **Analysis of consumer protection enforcement:** Member States are responsible for the enforcement of EU consumer law. The Scoreboard shows that the length of administrative proceedings and judicial review in this field varies a lot depending on the country. It also shows that many consumer issues are solved directly by consumer authorities and they don't need to go to courts.
- **Analysis of the fight against money laundering:** As required by the 4th Anti-Money Laundering directive, Member States have provided for the first time data in this area. It shows a large variation in case length – from less than half a year to almost three years- for proceedings dealing with anti-money laundering offenses.
- **Limited access to justice for poorer citizens:** the Scoreboard shows that in some Member States, citizens whose income is below the poverty threshold do not receive any legal aid in some types of disputes.
- **Use of ICT tools still limited in some countries:** while it's widely used for communication between courts and lawyers in half of the Member States, the use of ICT for electronic signature is very limited in over half the EU countries. New data on how lawyers use ICT when communicating with courts again underlines the importance of electronic communication for well-functioning justice systems.

- **Improved or stable perception of judicial independence among the general public:** this is the case in more than two-thirds of Member States, [compared to 2016](#). The trend is the same for businesses' perception since 2010. Among the reasons for the perceived lack of independence of courts and judges, the interference or pressure from government and politicians was the most stated reason. The 2017 edition also presents data on the safeguards in place in the different Member States to guarantee the judicial independence of judges. This reflects the strong importance of rule of law for the EU.
- **Quality standards:** Most Member States have standards fixing time limits or timeframes to avoid lengthy judicial proceedings. However, such standards are not in place in certain Member States with less efficient justice systems.

Next steps

The findings of the 2017 Scoreboard are being taken into account for the ongoing country-specific assessment carried out within the 2017 European Semester process. The country reports for Member States were published on 22 February 2017 and include findings on the justice systems of a number Member States (Belgium, Bulgaria, Spain, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia) (see [IP/17/308](#)).

Background

The Scoreboard mainly focuses on litigious civil and commercial cases as well as administrative cases in order to assist Member States in their efforts to pave the way for a more investment, business and citizen-friendly environment. The Scoreboard focuses on the three main elements of an effective justice system:

- **Efficiency:** indicators on the length of proceedings, clearance rate and number of pending cases.
- **Quality:** indicators on legal aid, court fees, training, monitoring of court activities, budget, and human resources.
- **Independence:** indicators on the perceived judicial independence among companies and the general public, and on safeguards relating to judges.

Improving the effectiveness of national justice systems is a well-established priority of the European semester – the EU's annual cycle of economic policy coordination. The EU Justice Scoreboard helps Member States to achieve this by providing an annual comparative overview of functioning of national justice systems. This overview is complemented by country-specific assessments carried out through bilateral dialogue with the national authorities and stakeholders concerned. This assessment may lead to country-specific recommendations on the improvement of national justice systems. In the 2016 European semester, based on a proposal from the Commission, the Council addressed country specific recommendations to six Member States in this area (Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Portugal and Slovakia).

The Scoreboard uses different sources of information. Main sources of data

are provided by the Council of Europe Commission for the Evaluation of the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ). Other sources of data include European networks such as the European Network of Councils for the Judiciary and the Network of the Presidents of the Supreme Judicial Courts of the EU, the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) and various committees in specific areas of EU legislation.

For more information

Justice Scoreboard 2017 [full report](#)

Summary of the Justice Scoreboard: [Factsheet](#)

[Q&A](#)

[Annotated graphs](#) with full figures

[Eurobarometer](#) on 'Perceived independence of the national justice systems in the EU among the general public'

[Eurobarometer](#) on 'Perceived independence of the national justice systems in the EU among companies'

[European Semester](#)

Statement on the latest developments in Venezuela

Ongoing escalation of tensions and violent confrontations during last days are only increasing divisions in Venezuela. But violence and use of force will not resolve the current crisis.

Heavily sanctioning the opposition – most recently an opposition politician Henrique Capriles Radonski who was banned from political life for 15 years – does not help to lower the unrest and the tensions in the country.

The Venezuelan people has the right to peacefully demonstrate and to see the political conflict immediately solved.

The European Union calls on all parties to find common ground and end the violence.

Reporting irregularities that may affect medicines

10/04/2017

EMA Board adopts new policy on handling information on alleged improprieties from external sources

The European Medicines Agency's (EMA) Management Board has adopted a new [policy on how EMA handles allegations of improprieties received from external parties](#). These improprieties may include allegations of departures from standards of good practices that could have an impact on the evaluation and supervision of medicines.

The goal is to create an environment where individuals from outside the Agency feel confident to raise their concerns on improprieties in their area of work. The policy helps EMA assess these reports and co-ordinate any further investigation in a structured way, while protecting the confidentiality of the reporter.

Since 2013, EMA has received a total of 43 reports that relate, for example, to the manufacturing of medicines or the conduct of clinical trials. Although no formal policy has existed until now, all reports were dealt with in line with the principles included in the new policy.

A dedicated email inbox, reporting@ema.europa.eu, has been created. Individuals external to EMA can raise their concerns by sending a message or providing information to this address. They can also send a letter to the Agency. Their identity will be kept confidential.

If the allegations concern a centrally authorised medicine, EMA will coordinate the investigation. If there are any concerns that the improprieties may affect the balance of benefits and risks of the medicine, EMA's scientific committees may consider regulatory action.

If the allegations concern a nationally authorised medicine, EMA may, on a case-by-case basis, refer the matter to the national medicines agency in the EU Member State where the concerned medicine is authorised.

If there is a suspicion that fraud is involved, EMA will transmit the report to the [European Anti-Fraud Office](#) (OLAF) in accordance with the existing arrangements between the two institutions.

The policy was adopted by the Management Board at its March meeting and came into effect on 17 March 2017. It was prepared in consultation with the European Commission and OLAF.

Statement by Federica Mogherini on the attacks on Coptic Churches in Egypt

In one of the Holiest days for the Christians all over the world, the Coptic churches in the Egyptian cities of Tanta and Alexandria have been attacked. Many innocent civilians have been killed or injured.

The European Union expresses its sincere condolences to the friends and families of the victims. Our thoughts are with them.

Those responsible for the attacks must be held accountable. Worshippers, no matter what their belief is, should always be free to pray in peace.

The European Union stands in solidarity with the Egyptian government and people in the fight against terrorism.

Syria: High Representative Federica Mogherini speaks to various interlocutors

Following the chemical weapons attack in Idlib province in Syria and the ensuing action, Federica Mogherini, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission, spoke today with a large number of her counterparts in the European Union Member States as well as the Presidents of the EU institutions, and interlocutors in international institutions and partners, among them UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, US Vice-President Mike Pence, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. She also spoke to UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura and Director General of the Organisation of Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Ahmet Üzümcü.

In her calls, HRVP Mogherini presented the position of the European Union on the latest developments

(<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/04/07-hr-dec...>)

and had an exchange of views on the way ahead, emphasising the need to accelerate talks for a credible political solution for the conflict in Syria. HRVP Mogherini will continue these exchanges in the coming days with partners, including at the meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of G7, taking place in Lucca in Italy early next week.